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## THE IMMIGRANT FAMILY

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The test of a good case worker is found in the many-sided field of social treatment as it relates to the immigrant. Not only is high skill demanded in analyzing personal difficulties but a knowledge of the customs and traditions as well as the inner hopes and aspirations of the immigrant is also imperative.

It is agreed that only a beginning has been made in social diagnosis in general, but it is not so certain that the same humbleness of spirit exists in regard to the plotting of a plan of action in relation to our foreign residents. Else why are so many philanthropic organizations found in immigrant communities still carrying on their case work in the rudimentary, undifferentiated fashion of considering certain human traits to be so basic that reactions are identical whether a man be a Russian or an Armenian, a French Canadian or a Pole? Societies recognize the fine gradations of analysis that are coming to be required in getting at the variations of mental power and of manual aptness. They draw on the knowledge of the psychiatrist, the psychologist, the vocational counselor, and yet most of these same societies meet the problems of the immigrant apparently in complete innocence as to the play of dominant racial experiences.

There has been a curious lapse in this respect in the building up of case work technique. In going about the country the writer has been interested in inquiring in regard to this question of specialization in case work for the immigrant and it would assist the general cause considerably if readers of this article would do the same. It will be found that in the majority of our large industrial areas where the issues, both personal and social, are intense, as well as in many of the foreign sections in our cities, organization after organization is functioning almost exactly as it would function in an American-born community. Two or three of the more important members of the nationalities living in the towns or districts of cities may serve on committees or boards of management and interpreters may be

used, but the executives who are intrusted with leadership will be found far too often to have had no experience that fits them to understand European customs. They have neither traveled abroad nor resided in local foreign colonies, and often they are amazingly lacking in an intelligent grasp of the fundamental issues involved in the adaptation of the personnel of their districts to the requirements of American living. Maximum results in the way of assisting the immigrant and his family will never be obtained so long as this holds true, nor will the community be stimulated as it should be.

It must be said to the credit of social work that in certain of its branches it has shot ahead of education. Americanization societies, immigrant protective leagues, and travelers' aid groups have shown how inadequate school work for immigrants has been and is. Cruel as much of the hyphenated American propaganda was, it roused the country into realizing what it had not done and an important part of the national defense program is now concerned in working for the best interests of the immigrant and, therefore, of ourselves. Night school procedure is gradually changing. Day classes in English and in other branches of study are operated for the benefit of night workers. Far greater attention is paid to instructing the non-English speaking mother. The schools are throwing their doors wide open for lectures, forums, civic clubs and discussion groups, as well as for musical societies, so that the thought life may be expressed and the refining elements of dormant art consciousness may be developed and brought out.

#### LARGER ASPECTS OF CASE WORK

The war has caused the question of immigration to be faced squarely, and every social, civic or philanthropic society that has had to do with the immigrant should take account of stock. The arguments pro and con for immigration are many. Economists take sides; the sociologists are not in one camp; those who are interested in political science are found to be divided. Among the general citizenship are those who believe in restricting immigration and those who do not. Where do the social workers stand? Sentiment, intuition, generalizations by only a few observers over only short periods of time will not help. Massed experience in which the varied elements of physical standard, mental power, industrial success, political effectiveness and ethical outlook are gauged not as sepa-

rate ends in themselves nor through abstraction but in the blend of personalities known, is the contribution demanded of social workers. Social workers may well ask whether their case work is in the hands of persons with the requisite breadth of understanding. Is case work so organized as to give the necessary data? Is the range of contact of secretaries such as to enable this data to be interpreted in its relatedness, not merely from the point of view of the individual but in order to contribute to problems such as the immigrant and labor, the immigrant and the race stock. These are some of the larger aspects of case work.

It is not the object of this paper to stand as an essay for or against any of these opinions on immigration but rather to point out that the case worker who does day to day work in immigrant communities and who is not viewing each day's experience as material to assist in the shaping of public policy toward the alien, not only negates social work but also becomes a deterrent factor in the progress of our knowledge of a subject which has untold influence on the future of America.

No society should be satisfied with a worker whose results are merely tabulated by jobs found, medical assistance given, or the number of children's difficulties that have been straightened out. A certain proportion of successful results is to be taken for granted by any one who has been trained for a calling. Efficiency comes from what is played up out of personal contacts. Here is where a case worker falls down unless the tangled scope of the immigration problem is clearly sensed and unless the bristling questions that are being faced by outlying sciences as they play into the field of social work are understood well enough to be tested by each individual need or family necessity.

For example, what policy does the worker advocate in regard to industrial adjustment as a result of experience with out-of-work cases? How do the immigrant cases differ from similar cases which involve the American-born? What is the statistical comparison of disease between a given race and the American-born? If the immigrant is more resistant than the native-born, why? If less resistant, why? Do local case histories tally with available statistical material? If not, why? A contribution may be lurking in such a search for fact within the range of the sphere of the case worker.

## PROPER QUALIFICATIONS FOR CASE WORKERS

Granted that this interplay between the actual needs of men and women is known and that the issues involved affecting our social structure are recognized; granted that the method is adopted of analyzing each person's difficulties in the light of the group problems of a given nationality; and granted finally that so wide a responsibility is assumed as that of attacking such an assumption as national deterioration in the light of local knowledge,—a question still arises as to the qualifications and training of persons who are to serve public and private agencies in the field of action of the immigrant. As to the personal qualifications of a worker with immigrants, certainly there should be no ray of prejudice. The worker who is so caught by the romance of difference as to see every immigrant problem in high lights is quite as much against the cause of the immigrant as the one who cannot shake off the shackles of Anglo-Saxon provincialism. In other words, the balanced, scientific mind that searches and waits is of importance: not, however, the scientific mind of the recluse but of the individual who lives with men.

Absolute science plays its part on the elemental plane; beyond are all those ranges of thought and association which make our civilization, the change of emphasis of which can only be known by close contact with people. If it be permitted to recognize temperament, a social worker with immigrants, more even than those in other fields, should have that intangible power of winning confidence and of rousing belief in self which breaks down all barriers and brings about understanding on the basis of human nature. This is especially important in the case of a worker whose race stock is different from the race stock of the community which is served.

This leads to a mooted point. Which will do the better, a person whose parentage reaches back far enough to be considered a real product of our country or one who, if not an Americanized immigrant, was born in this country of immigrant parents? If it were positively stated that only Italians should work among Italians, Bohemians among Bohemians, such a statement would be far afield. This error is made by certain societies organized on a racial basis. On the other hand, society after society in this country is crippled because the staff is made up of persons with no affiliations with

the racial groups among which they are working. The fact of the matter is that a member of a given race has certain marked advantages over a person not of that race. The ability to talk freely in a mutually understood language, appreciation of a common tradition, the understanding of racial or religious customs, are tremendously important and are of immediate advantage in the first days of confusion and inquiry when the immigrant arrives in this country. As soon as the immigrant has gained a footing, however, another consideration enters in and that is the obligation to bring the immigrant into such contact with Americans and American ways as will lead to an appreciation of the American outlook.

The history of the Slavs has made the Slav. The history back of America has made the American. It is incumbent upon us that we understand those who come from Europe. It is equally necessary that they appreciate the type of person born and bred here for generations and reared under our institutions. This is fair play and the faults of both in relation to our country can only be eradicated by mutual coöperative effort based on understanding; and this cannot be brought about at arm's length. Therefore, the person of American descent whose background of experience justifies the claim of understanding the alien, has a place on the staff of societies organized to assist the immigrant.

When residents of a locality take the attitude that no straight American should be engaged in their district, they are to be condemned as missing an opportunity, not only directly for themselves but also in the way of interpreting their contribution to that larger circle called the public on whom after all their welfare depends. The ideal combination of workers would include both persons who have immigrant ties and those who have not. Under no consideration should a person be made a secretary for the mere reason that it is thought advisable to have a representative of a certain racial group on the staff for that reason alone. Standards of efficiency have too often been let down when it was decided to appoint persons who are members of alien groups so that truly representative agents have not been chosen. The foreign-speaking agent should have inborn qualities of a high order and should serve an apprenticeship over a period of time long enough to know well the resources of a community. Certainly no novice should ever be plunged into an immigrant district. A secretary not of European parentage should not

only have a wide range of experience in case work but also the asset of long-term residence in a foreign colony in order to appreciate the norm of a race and also in order to know the special difficulties the immigrant meets with in this country. This subtle understanding does not come in one week or two.

The training of a case worker among immigrants should be concerned not only with the usual methods of social diagnosis and treatment but with the working of the institutions that have been organized particularly for immigrants. The operation of our laws should be studied and tested. What public officials can and cannot do should be known. No one should begin to do case work among immigrants who is not thoroughly familiar with the method by which aliens are admitted into this country and guided to their destinations; with the operation of the courts as they affect the immigrant; with the steps that lead to citizenship; with the employment offices as they serve in getting work. The weak and strong points of both public and private agencies must be known and a person should have become expert in using available resources or in supplementing the same before an appointment as an executive can be expected.

#### TYPES OF IMMIGRANT PROBLEMS

Compared with case work in the main, individual and family immigrant problems that an agency is called upon to face are not of the degenerative type. The immigrant gets into trouble and needs assistance most often because of a failure to understand American requirements or because of imperfect adaptation to our conditions. Of course, certain immigrants drink to excess. Of course, there are the shiftless among them as well as those who neglect their homes and those who fail to go forward. Sickness, too, plays its part in our case work for the immigrant. In general, however, it can be taken as a fair presumption that the needs of immigrants who apply for aid can be discovered with comparative ease and that the proportion of successful results to failures will be high. This statement should not for a moment be taken as inferring that our native stock presents more difficulties or difficulties of a kind that do not yield to ready solution, but it must be frankly admitted that those who are native bred will not go to a charity except as a last step.

On the other hand, the immigrant tends to turn to local agencies for assistance for no other reason than to be sure that the right track has been chosen. This is more and more true now that the races coming to us are finding us far different from themselves. The immigrant arrives with a humble trust in the helpful personal interest of Americans. Even police officers are often asked to decide upon the most intimate matters of family policy. In short, a worker among immigrants can take it for granted that an immigrant in entering an office has come for information or guidance as such, that there is no drag of personal weakness or broken ties of family or group to be faced in the majority of instances.

*An illustration.* A man out of work and physically run down had been working as an unskilled helper in a factory. Wages at the time he was interviewed were \$2.50 per day. He had been in the United States two years and said he had been a draftsman in Europe. The man was given a pencil and to the surprise of the agent drew the picture of a cottage in which he had lived in Italy and when asked how the rooms were arranged in the cottage, drew a floor plan. The man was asked if he was in need of money. He replied that he was not but he was greatly worried because he would be in a couple of weeks. He said he had heard that the agent could help him to get another position where his work would not be as hard.

*Action on the case.* An appointment was made with an Italian physician who reported that the man needed rest and that he was unstrung nervously because he did not like his work which had been too heavy for him. An architect was telephoned to. By a stroke of good fortune he said he would see the man.

*Result.* Eight (8) years from that date, the family was living in a suburban home which was being paid for through a coöperative bank.

It is to be noted in connection with this case that very few questions were asked. The record might be considered incomplete, yet certainly the art of a good case worker consists in knowing what not to ask quite as much as what to ask. With immigrants it is of prime importance that their confidence be won. Great care should be taken not to cause self-consciousness through too close an inquiry into personal affairs. Many an immigrant has been turned aside by too incisive a method on the part of case workers, and the uncoöperative attitude of immigrants who have been in this country for a time is undoubtedly due to prejudice engendered by the lack of appreciation by an agent of the need of care in a first approach. It would be a fair guess to state that societies in which immigrant needs factor largely, will testify that 90 per cent of their cases will revolve around such matters as advice regarding where work can be

found, or better jobs obtained; questions as to our savings institutions; problems involving their own desire to learn English and to educate their children; matters concerned with sending for relatives or getting in touch with members of their families who are supposed to have arrived in this country or are expected; questions in regard to becoming citizens and matters which concern medical care. Immigrants need to be told where to go for work and to be put in touch with the leaders of their race who can be trusted. They need to be directed to public agencies that will assist them, such as immigration bureaus, night schools and recreation centers, and the skill with which this is accomplished means everything for the future of those who come to us. Every inquiry carries with it the responsibility of so answering that the immigrant leaves with a clear understanding of the matter in which he is interested and feeling encouraged to return if again puzzled.

Enough has been said to make the point that in immigrant case work more frequently than not the problem is one of putting persons in touch with resources that are unknown to them. The immigrant comes to us strong, eager, ambitious. Give him a chance and he will do the rest. Difficult personal idiosyncrasies do not play a large part in case work with the alien nor does family discord. Would that the same were true of the second generation!

#### THE SECOND GENERATION OF IMMIGRANTS

Our contact with the immigrant straight from the old country convinces us that he is seldom unable to care for himself. His children, however, are found on our relief lists and in the ranks of the unemployed to too large an extent. No fair-minded person can lay this fact to anything other than our own American neglect. Two lines of effort open up here for the case worker.

First: a far more refined fitting of individual ability to opportunity than has been carried out and a more drastic attack on certain environmental conditions which weigh heavily upon the immigrant. At present the immigrant is fed into industry as nothing more than a unit of man power. The time is approaching when the government employment agency will use the vocational method of considering special aptitudes for particular jobs. Immigration brings in a mass of unskilled labor, it is true, but there have been hundreds of instances of men whose skill as machinists or craftsmen

has been wasted because they have not known where to go for guidance or because an employment agency has not taken the pains to consider anything but the fact that a man needed work and that any job would do.

Not only are the government employment agencies moving on toward the point of greater care in classifying workers, but industry itself is concentrating on lessening the labor turnover and is engaging persons to test out special ability.

Further, considering the European environment from which certain of our immigrant groups come, it is essential that we get those with an agricultural bent out on to the land. Although some gain has been made in this matter of distribution during the past few years, we have only begun to attack the problem so that the case worker with immigrants will find a fertile field in this direction for individual suggestion and individual encouragement.

Case work records of an agency tell their own story of difficulty. They present the effects of heredity, the overpowering result of disorganized family life and the insuperable difficulties of environmental conditions. With the immigrant we find not so much difficulties of heredity as lowered family unity. We find bad housing, the evils of congested areas and industrial exploitation playing their part in breaking down the natural mental power, moral rectitude and physical tone of the immigrant. Since this is true, efforts to assist individuals stand indicted unless, coupled with these, case workers use every means for attacking environmental handicaps.

A native of this country is often not in close enough touch with European family standards to realize fully how very important it is to go back continually to the family relationship in given individual difficulties or in thinking out a plan of action for a boy or girl, man or woman. Two extremes are often faced in immigrant situations: the instances where persons have no relatives in this country and so are free from all family restraints, and the instances where family dominance is so strong as completely to submerge the individual and create an almost insuperable obstacle to necessary freedom of action.

The case worker should work sympathetically with the latter situation, remembering how important a part the family has played in the history of certain foreign races and in a negative way reasoning back from forms of anti-social traits which, particularly in

young people, develop because parental respect and the ideal of the home circle has broken down. The family ceremonial should be honored and interpreted to our young foreign citizens in its American setting.

#### IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THE PROBLEM

It is never safe in any form of problem not to reason from the physical, mental and the moral responsibilities of a person back to assets or defects in family situations as well as to consider the helps or handicaps that may spring from association. With the immigrant the surrounding groups of which he is one are all important. Custom has at once a binding effect which may need to be modified and at the same time a protective influence that must be brought to bear on many a situation, and in this regard no two nations are alike. There is all the variation of temperamental reactions as well as traditional code. A case worker is treading on dangerous ground unless these distinctions are recognized.

With a person who has no family ties, the building up of acquaintanceships among those who have enough at stake in a neighborhood to be acted upon by public opinion cannot be brought about too quickly. It is more and more coming to be accepted that the judgment of one's peers acts as a centripetal force in holding one up to accepted standards of thought and action. When persons are free from the obligations of family and are outside the pale of the effect of community requirements, a decidedly unnatural situation is created. Example after example could be given where the building up of community ties has swung persons from danger into resistant self-assertion.

By way of summary we may say that aside from the usual identifying data of the name, address, et cetera, which need not be detailed here, it is essential not only to get the country from which a person comes but also the section of the country. Occupational circumstances should be gone into carefully since in many parts of Europe lines of work may be similar to lines of work here and yet vary greatly as to the technical requirements and the conditions under which labor is carried on.

Moreover, it is not always safe to assume that an immigrant is uneducated, in its broadest meaning, even though he may have had little schooling. In certain sections, the folk organizations of the

people have for many years been such as to develop a depth of thought and a sort of philosophy, to say nothing of a practical kind of reasoning. Only a limited training in symbols of languages is needed to remove such a person far from the illiterate group. It must be remembered, too, that the importance of the church varies markedly in certain parts of Europe.

One of the most important considerations is getting at the reason why the person came to this country. These factors are extremely important in helping to bring out the right kind of assets in a case of need or to make possible connections with persons who would be willing to extend the advantages of good fellowship to a stranger or to connect a person with any of our organized forces of civic or social life.

In facing any given problem one reasons first in terms of the power of the individual. What has he within himself? What has been given him by nature? What has been added by training? What does he possess in the way of experience and how does he fit into his circle of associates? Then, what is there in the family situation which will push him forward or draw him back? What does the community offer in the way of giving play to the possibilities made apparent by these two lines of deduction?